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ABSTRACT

A study provides an organized list of core English language arts standards and benchmarks that are recognized by most or all of the states in the Central Region (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) and that are found in standards documents that have been rated as exemplary by national organizations. In short, this list of standards and benchmarks embodies content that is highly valued nationally as well as within the Central Region. Analysts selected as the reference document a McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning) study that identified only highly rated English language arts standards and benchmarks. The identified state standards documents (one from each of the seven states) were examined for this study: The process of comparison first was undertaken independently by two analysts. Each analyst indicated which states addressed the same content as that found in the reference document. When both analyses were completed, a third analyst then compared the reviews to resolve discrepancies that were significant. This paper discusses the findings from the analyses. The paper cites exemplary English language arts standards commonly found in the central region and those rarely found in the central region. (NKA)

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EXEMPLARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS AMONG THE SEVEN STATES IN THE CENTRAL REGION

Prepared by

John S. Kendall
Jennifer S. Norford
Christina E. Snyder

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 South Parker Road, Suite 500
Aurora, CO 80014
303.337.0990 (phone)
303.337.3005 (fax)

Prepared for

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Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 S. Parker Road, Suite 500
Aurora, CO 80014
303.337.0990 (phone)
303.337.3005 (fax)
www.mcrel.org

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This study provides an organized list of core English language arts standards and benchmarks that are recognized by most or all of the states in the Central Region (comprised of Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) and that are found in standards documents that have been rated as exemplary by national organizations. In short, this list of standards and benchmarks embodies content that is highly valued nationally as well as within the Central Region. Current school reform efforts create a significant demand for curriculum materials that help students achieve specific and worthwhile standards. A shared set of standards and benchmarks should provide educators with a focus for their efforts to find or contribute high-quality materials that support exemplary standards and benchmarks.

METHOD

To ensure that the list of standards and benchmarks ultimately produced by this study would indeed be exemplary, analysts selected as the reference document a McREL study that identified only highly rated English language arts standards and benchmarks (Kendall, Snyder, Schintgen, Wahlquist, & Marzano, 1999). That project identified the English language arts content present in documents from a handful of states that were highly rated by national organizations for the quality of their standards. It was reasoned that such a list of content represented what reputable national organizations (specifically, the American Federation of Teachers, the Council for Basic Education, and the Fordham Foundation) deemed to be model content in the English language arts. State standards were reviewed against this reference set of standards and benchmarks to determine what content from the reference document also was commonly valued among the seven states in the Central Region. The following state standards documents were examined:

- *Colorado Model Content Standards: Reading & Writing* (1995, July)
- *Kansas Curricular Standards for Reading and Writing* (1998, June)
- *Missouri's Framework for Curriculum Development in Communication Arts K–12* (1996)
- *Nebraska Reading/Writing Standards* (1998, February)[1]
- *North Dakota Standards and Benchmarks: Content Standards: English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (1996)
- *South Dakota Content Standards: Communications/Language Arts* (1998, December)
- *Wyoming Language Arts Content and Performance Standards* (1998, June)

The three analysts (the authors) who undertook this work share more than 20 years of experience in the analysis of standards documents, with emphasis in the English language arts. The process of comparison first was undertaken independently by two analysts. Each analyst indicated which

1 The Nebraska standards for English language arts were revised after the inception of this study. An analysis of the re-issued standards showed that the differences they reflect have little to no effect on the results presented here.

states addressed the same content as that found in the reference document. Thus, for any benchmark in the reference document, anywhere from zero to all seven states were identified as sharing the same content. In the course of content analysis, benchmarks were mapped within two grades of the grade range of the reference document. (For further discussion, see the "Organization of Content" section.)

When both analyses were completed, a third analyst then compared the reviews in order to resolve discrepancies that were significant, specifically, those discrepancies that would have a bearing on whether the identified content would be included in the final list of commonly found standards and benchmarks. The threshold for inclusion of content in the list was determined after a preliminary review of the results, which is discussed in the following section.

Threshold for Inclusion

A preliminary comparison of the two independent reviews of state standards against the reference document indicated that if the list of standards and benchmarks was restricted to only content found to be common across every state, then the number of benchmarks identified would be fairly small and not very informative. For example, the preliminary analysis showed that all states required students to acquire reading strategies, which vary in difficulty with the grade level of study. Such a finding is not surprising, nor particularly useful. However, if the content to be identified was expanded to content common to *any six or all seven* states, then the number of common benchmarks was considerably expanded and likely to be of greater use. Specifically, just 11 benchmarks were found to be common to all seven states in the preliminary analysis, while 57 benchmarks, after the final analysis and resolution of discrepant ratings, were common among six or seven states. The threshold was not further lowered to content that might be present in *any five of seven states*, for two reasons. First, the utility of the list for all states would be compromised if a significant number of the benchmarks presented in the list were found in only five states. It was calculated that more than a quarter of the benchmarks would be common to just five states. Second, it would be difficult to describe the list as representative of states in the region if such a large portion of benchmarks was found in just 71 percent (five of seven) of the states. Conversely, if the list were restricted to the commonalities found in six or more states, the list of benchmarks would represent, at the very least, 86 percent of the Central Region states.

Organization of Content

The resulting list of exemplary benchmarks commonly found in the Central Region begins on page 4. The benchmarks are organized by the standards used in the reference document. These standards do not differ significantly from the kinds of standards found in most English language arts documents, including the state documents reviewed here. These standards serve as useful organizers of information; the content of primary interest is found in the benchmarks. The benchmarks are presented in the grade ranges of K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12, which is consistent with the structure of the reference document. Table 1 shows the variation of grade ranges used in the seven state documents.

Table 1. Benchmark Grade Ranges Used by the Seven Central Region States

STATE DOCUMENT	BENCHMARK GRADE RANGE
Colorado Model Content Standards: Reading & Writing	K–4, 5–8, 9–12
Kansas Curricular Standards for Reading and Writing	K–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–11
Missouri's Framework for Curriculum Development in Communication Arts	K–4, 5–8, 9–12
Nebraska Reading/Writing Standards	K–1, 2–4, 5–8, 9–12
North Dakota Standards and Benchmarks: Content Standards: English Language Arts Curriculum Framework	K–4, 5–8, 9–12
South Dakota Content Standards: Communications/Language Arts	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9–12
Wyoming Language Arts Content and Performance Standards	K–4, 5–8, 9–11

In the course of the content analysis, benchmarks were mapped no more than two grades from the range of the reference document. In all instances, the content was mapped to the most appropriate developmental level.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

The preliminary comparison of the independent reviews revealed other information that might be of interest to educators in the region. Specifically, a number of benchmarks present in the reference document, and therefore viewed as important English language arts content in highly rated standards documents, were found to be either missing from all state documents or present in just one or two states. These benchmarks are listed beginning on page 11.

EXEMPLARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS COMMONLY FOUND IN THE CENTRAL REGION

Seven state standards documents were compared against a set of exemplary standards in the English language arts. The benchmarks presented on the following pages were found to be present in highly rated standards documents and in standards documents of at least six of seven states in the Central Region. These benchmarks are organized by the following standards:

1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
2. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
3. Gathers and uses information for research purposes
4. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
5. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts
6. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts
7. Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Grades K–2

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 3–5

- Uses a variety of strategies to generate ideas for written work (e.g., develops a plan, groups related ideas, organizes information according to type and purpose of writing)

- Uses strategies to draft and revise written work (e.g., produces multiple drafts; focuses on a central idea; includes descriptive details; uses elements of style, such as word choice, tone, voice, sentence variation; organizes ideas; revises for clarity, content, vocabulary, details, sequence, coherence, point of view; adds, deletes, consolidates, and rearranges text)

- Uses strategies to edit and publish written work (e.g., edits for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling; uses resources to edit and proofread, such as word lists, dictionaries, spell checker, style manuals; uses own standards or judgment of quality to evaluate work; presents final work according to purpose, by displaying, publishing, mailing, performing, reading aloud; uses available technology to publish written work)

Grades 6–8

- Uses a variety of strategies to generate ideas for written work (e.g., note taking, outlining, summarizing)

- Uses strategies to draft and revise written work (e.g., establishes central idea, organization, elaboration, unity; uses vocabulary and information to convey central idea, tone, and voice; addresses purpose and audience; revises for clarity, word choice, organization, consistent point of view, transitions, diction, underlying logic, consistency of ideas)

- Uses strategies to edit and publish written work (e.g., edits for sentence structure, mechanics, usage, spelling; uses established criteria to evaluate own and others' writing; uses available technology, such as a word processor, publishing program, database, or spreadsheets to publish written work)

- Uses content, style, and structure appropriate for particular audiences, purpose, and situations (e.g., formal or informal language, genre, format, organizational pattern)

Grades 9–12

- Uses strategies to generate ideas for written work (e.g., considers audience and purpose in planning; develops a focus; organizes ideas and details)

- Uses strategies to draft and revise written work (e.g., uses specific vocabulary and information, clear word choice and vivid description; uses a specific point of view, characterization, and style; improves clarity, content, depth of information and

presentation technique, accuracy, logic of organization, sentence variety, personal style; uses feedback from peers and teacher; rethinks how well he or she has addressed genre, purpose, and audience; highlights individual voice)

- Uses strategies to edit and publish written work (e.g., edits for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling; suggests how writing could be improved; uses available technology, such as publishing software and graphic programs, to design and publish documents; uses visual aids, such as graphs, tables, pictures)

- Uses strategies to adapt writing for different audiences (e.g., uses suitable content, vocabulary, style, structure, tone, and voice; considers background, age, and knowledge of audience; uses appropriate level of formality)

- Uses strategies to adapt writing for different purposes (e.g., to explain, inform, analyze, entertain)

- Uses strategies to write expository text (e.g., uses evidence to support a thesis, conveys information and ideas from primary and secondary sources; distinguishes relative importance of data, facts, ideas; uses visual aids to organize and record information; anticipates and addresses reader's biases and expectations; uses technical terms and notations)

2. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Grades K–2

- Uses conventions of spelling in written work (e.g., spells high-frequency words and phonetically regular words; uses letter/sound relationships; spells basic short vowel, long vowel, *r*-controlled, and consonant-blend patterns)

- Uses content, style, and structure appropriate for particular audiences, purpose, and situations (e.g., formal or informal language, genre, format, organizational pattern)

- Uses conventions of punctuation in written work (e.g., ending punctuation; commas in heading, greeting, closing, and address of a letter; commas in dates and items in a series; quotation marks; contractions and singular possessive pronouns)

Grades 3–5

- Uses conventions of grammar and usage in written work (e.g., uses nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, adverbial words and phrases, regular and irregular verbs; uses the pronoun *I* in compound subjects; uses conjunctions to separate sentences and connect independent clauses; uses participial and prepositional phrases; uses past, present, and future verb tenses; forms plurals; follows principles of agreement: subject-verb, gender, number, case; avoids double negatives)

- Uses conventions of spelling in written work (e.g., frequently used words; one-syllable words that have blends; contractions; compounds; patterns; common homophones; roots; inflections; suffixes; prefixes)

- Uses conventions of capitalization in written work (e.g., sentence beginnings, titles, abbreviations, proper nouns, countries, cities, months, days, geographic names, holidays, historical periods, special events, works of art, organizations, first word in quotations)

- Uses conventions of punctuation in written work (e.g., commas in series, dates, and addresses; possessives and quotation marks; commas in a greeting and closing in a letter; quotations in dialogue; apostrophes; commas for items in series; parentheses; underlining; italics for titles; colon to separate hour and minutes; quotation marks around direct quotations and titles of poems, songs, short stories; declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences)

Grades 6–8

- Uses conventions of grammar and usage in written work (e.g., uses principles of agreement: pronoun-noun, preposition-pronoun, subject-verb; uses proper pronoun case; uses parts of speech: adverbs; comparative adjectives; uses relative and indefinite pronouns; uses present perfect, past perfect, and future verb tenses; uses prepositions; uses infinitives and participles; uses modifiers; uses coordinate and subordinate conjunctions)

- Uses conventions of spelling in written work (e.g., for frequently misspelled words, such as *their*, *they're*, and *there*; uses spelling of bases and affixes to spell derivatives)

- Uses conventions of capitalization in written work (e.g., for sentence beginnings, titles, abbreviations, proper nouns, direct quotations)

- Uses conventions of punctuation in written work (e.g., sentence endings, commas in a series, commas in compound sentences, abbreviations, quotation marks, colon in a business letter greeting, apostrophes, semicolons to connect independent clauses, hyphens, dashes, brackets)

Grades 9–12

- Uses conventions of grammar and usage in written work (e.g., pronoun-noun and preposition-pronoun agreement; gerunds, infinitives, participles; phrases and clauses; consistent verb tenses; conditional tenses)

- Uses conventions of spelling in written work (e.g., spells frequently used words correctly and uses effective strategies for spelling unfamiliar words; uses a dictionary or thesaurus to aid spelling)

- Uses conventions of capitalization in written work

- Uses conventions of punctuation in written work (e.g., commas, ellipses, apostrophes, semicolons, colons, hyphens, dashes, italics)

3. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Grades K–2

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 3–5

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 6–8

- Uses a variety of print, nonprint, and electronic sources to gather information for research topics (e.g., card catalogs; atlases; dictionaries; globes; encyclopedias; databases; almanacs; fact books; pamphlets; technical manuals; online databases; computer networks and modems; magazines; newspapers; indexes, including the *Reader's Guide to Periodicals*; interviews)

Grades 9–12

- Uses a variety of criteria to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of research information (e.g., knowledge of author, topic, or context; use of logic, propaganda, language, bias, position; date of publication; arguments used; comprehensiveness of evidence)

- Uses standard format and methodology for documenting reference sources (e.g., credits quoted and paraphrased ideas; understands the meaning and consequences of plagiarism; distinguishes own ideas from others'; uses a style sheet method for citing sources, such as MLA, APA, or *Chicago Manual of Style*; includes a bibliography of reference materials)

4. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Grades K–2

- Uses a variety of meaning clues (e.g., uses pictures, title, cover, key words, headings, illustrations; uses general knowledge of story, structure, sequence, and topic; uses prior knowledge) to understand text and make predictions about content (e.g., actions, events, behaviors)

- Uses basic elements of phonetic analysis (e.g., understands sound-symbol relationships; uses beginning and ending consonants to decode single-syllable words; uses vowel sounds and patterns; blends beginning, middle, and ending sounds; uses word patterns; blends vowel and consonant sounds) to decode unknown words

Grades 3–5

- Uses a variety of methods to make, confirm, and revise predictions (e.g., previews illustrations, headings, and format; uses prior knowledge; uses illustrations, titles, topic sentences, important words, foreshadowing clues)

- Uses phonetic and structural analysis to decode and pronounce unfamiliar words (e.g., letter/sound relationships, less common vowel patterns, homophones, word origins, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, multiple meanings, homographs, idioms, common root words, prefixes, suffixes, syllabication, complex word families)

- Uses context clues to decode and understand new words (e.g., figurative or metaphorical use of words)

Grades 6–8

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 9–12

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

5. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts

Grades K–2

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts (e.g., story books, poems, fairy tales, narratives, fables)

- Knows sequence, setting, characters, main events, and plot in stories

- Uses prior knowledge and personal experience to understand text (e.g., events, characters, conflicts, themes)

Grades 3–5

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts (e.g., biographies, historical fiction, poetry, fiction, fairy tales, fables, narratives from different cultures, drama, nonfiction, myths, folk tales, legends)

- Understands basic elements of plot (e.g., main problem, conflict, resolution, cause-and-effect)

- Understands similarities and differences among works from various genres and cultures (e.g., lives of two people in biographies; character types and use of natural phenomena in tales from different cultures; setting; events; themes; point of view)

- Understands elements of character development in literary works (e.g., differences between main and minor characters; how dialogue and action establish a character's

background and traits; the importance of a character's actions, motives, and appearance to plot or theme)

Grades 6–8

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of fiction texts (e.g., realistic, fantasy, historical, biographical, poetry)

- Understands the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres (e.g., short stories, essays, speeches, lyric and narrative poems, plays, novels, fiction, nonfiction, epics, fables, myths, drama)

- Understands plot development in literary works (e.g., relationships between events and past or present actions; foreshadowing of future actions; use of subplots, parallel episodes, and climax; development of conflict and resolution; cause-and-effect relationships; degree to which plot is contrived or realistic)

- Understands character development in literary works (e.g., how qualities of the central character support the plot and determine resolution of the conflict; how form, such as narrative poem or lengthy fiction, affects character development; how characters are developed through their words, speech patterns, thoughts, actions, narrator's description, and interaction with other characters; how motivations of major and minor characters are revealed)

- Understands inferred and recurring themes in literary works (e.g., themes of bravery, loyalty, friendship, effects of loneliness, good vs. evil; historical, cultural, and social themes; themes across texts)

- Understands the use of language and word choice in literary works to convey mood, images, and meaning (e.g., jargon; dialect; dialogue; multiple meanings; symbolism; irony; rhyme; voice; tone; sound, such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia; figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, allusion; sentence structure, line length, punctuation)

Grades 9–12

- Reads a variety of literary works (e.g., literature from different eras and cultures, American literature, British literature, poetry)

- Understands themes across a variety of literary works and genres (e.g., universal themes in literature of all cultures, such as initiation, love and duty, heroism, death and rebirth; major themes in American literature)

- Understands the effects of an author's style and the use of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work (e.g., image, sound, point of view, diction, dialogue, figurative language, syntax, allusions, symbols, irony, voice, tone, foreshadowing, understatement, overstatement, paradox, flashback, time and sequence, narrator, mood)

6. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts

Grades K–2

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., nonfiction, multi-step instructions)

Grades 3–5

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., nonfiction, multi-step instructions)

Grades 6–8

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., instructions, charts, tables, schedules, time lines, manuals, expository texts, persuasive texts)

Grades 9–12

- Uses reading strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., instructions for computer software, job descriptions, college applications, information about lab experiments, historical papers, government documents)

- Uses a variety of criteria to evaluate information (e.g., clarity, accuracy, author's bias, use of persuasive strategies, consistency, clarity of purpose, effectiveness of organizational pattern, logic, reasoning, expertise of author, propaganda techniques, authenticity, appeal to friendly or hostile audience, acknowledgment of reader concerns and counterclaims)

7. Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

Grades K–2

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 3–5

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 6–8

- *No commonalities found among six or more states*

Grades 9–12

- Evaluates own and others' effectiveness in group discussions and in formal presentations (e.g., own role in preparation and delivery; effectiveness of group process; accuracy, relevance, organization of ideas and evidence, clarity, delivery; effectiveness of illustrations, statistics, comparisons, and analogies; relationships among purpose, audience, and content; logic and manipulative techniques; use of words, expressions, style, diction, tone, syntax, rhetorical structure, and conventions of language; speaker's bias; coherence of main points, types of arguments used; use of logical fallacies)

EXEMPLARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS RARELY FOUND IN THE CENTRAL REGION

Seven state standards documents were compared against a set of exemplary standards in English language arts. This section provides a list of benchmarks that were found in the reference document of exemplary standards, but appeared in just two or fewer state standards documents in the Central Region. These benchmarks are organized by the following standards:

1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
2. Gathers and uses information for research purposes
3. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
4. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts
5. Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Grades 3–5

- Writes in response to literature (e.g., uses examples from the text, other works, prior knowledge, or experiences; relates own ideas to supporting details; summarizes main ideas and significant details; develops interpretations based on careful reading)

- Uses paragraph form in writing (e.g., uses indentation; uses topic sentences and simple supporting facts and details; includes an introduction and a conclusion to summarize; writes multiple paragraphs)

Grades 6–8

- Uses strategies to write in response to literature (e.g., states an interpretive, analytic, evaluative, or reflective position; supports inferences or conclusions with examples from the text, personal experience, other works, or nonprint media; relates own ideas to supporting details; provides support adequate to the type of literary selection; develops and justifies ideas; draws inferences about the effects of the work on the audience)

2. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Grades 3–5

- Uses a variety of strategies to identify topics to investigate (e.g., constructs questions, narrows the focus of a topic, identifies prior knowledge, develops a plan for gathering information)

- Uses strategies to write research reports (e.g., evaluates and synthesizes information for use in writing; incorporates notes into a finished product; uses appropriate visual aids; includes simple facts, details, explanations, examples)

3. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Grades 6–8

- Uses word origins and derivations to understand word meaning (e.g., Latin and Greek roots, meanings of foreign words frequently used in the English language, historical influences on English word meanings)

- Understands devices used to support author's purpose (e.g., relationships among style, form, and intended impact on reader; use of details; portrayal of themes and main ideas; use of a specific genre)

4. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts

Grades 6–8

- Understands relationships among story elements (e.g., the influence of setting on problem and resolution; the relevance of setting [place, time, customs] to mood, tone, meaning of text; the features of theme conveyed through characters, actions, images; the contributions of characters, plot, setting to overall impact)

Grades 9–12

- Knows archetypes (e.g., banishment from an ideal world, universal destruction, supernatural helpers, magical objects, journeys and tests) present in a variety of texts (e.g., American literature, literature of other cultures, myths, literature based on oral tradition, political speeches, film, religious writing, propaganda)

5. Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

Grades 3–5

- Understands techniques used in various media (e.g., basic propaganda techniques; persuasive techniques, such as promises, dares, flattery; the use of fact, opinion, and misleading information; the use of images and symbols central to particular messages; techniques used in television; visual techniques used to influence opinions, decision making, and cultural perceptions)

Grades 9–12

- Uses strategies to present oral interpretations of literature (e.g., cites text in support of assertions; presents characters in improvisational, informal, and formal productions; conveys significant ideas, ambiguities, and nuances of the work; analyzes imagery, language, and universal themes; recites poems, selections from speeches, dramatic soliloquies)

- Uses visual aids or technology to support presentations (e.g., charts, photographs, transparencies, slides, electronic media, text, images, sound)

- Understands the techniques and impact of visual media (e.g., aesthetic effects of media; strategies used to inform, persuade, entertain, transmit culture; advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; special effects; impact of media on politics; techniques used for particular audiences; ways in which different media cover the same events; impact of media on daily life; persuasive techniques; use of music, camera angles, fade-outs, lighting to impact audiences)

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